DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 300 891 EA 020 364

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TITLE An Ethnography of Career Ladder Planning and Implementation.
PUB DATE Apr 87
NOTE 21p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (Washington, DC, April 20-24, 1987).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Career Ladders; *Differentiated Staffs; Elementary Secondary Education; *Merit Pay; *Personnel Policy; Program Implementation; Recognition (Achievement); *Salary Wage Differentials; Summative Evaluation; Teacher Alienation; *Teacher Attitudes; Teacher Evaluation; Teacher Selection
IDENTIFIERS *Danville City School District VA

ABSTRACT

This paper presents initial findings of a 3-year study of career ladder design and implementation in the Danville (Virginia) school system, focusing on data collected primarily between April 1986 and April 1987, after the first group of candidates was promoted to the rank of career teacher and a second group was undergoing review for similar advancement the following summer. Data came from three sources: a survey of teacher attitudes toward the career ladder and its summative evaluation system, interviews with principals, and narrative ethnographic notes and documents describing career ladder-related events and commentary in context. Analysis of these data disclosed 29 issues that have become prominent as a result of the plan's first implementation. These issues are grouped and discussed under the following subheadings: (1) the general notion of rewarding teachers differentially (merit pay); (2) the likely effects of the career ladder plan; (3) the number of teachers judged to be less than outstanding; and (4) selection processes. Findings show that the majority of teachers still express displeasure over the plan and indicate that they do not intend to participate, primarily because of their opposition to the idea of merit pay, although interest in the plan is significantly greater among teachers relatively new to the system. (TE)

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An Ethnography of Career Ladder Planning and Implementation

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Presentation at AERA Convention, Washington, 4/87

This paper will present initial findings of a three-year study of career ladder design and implementation in the Danville, Virginia, school system. Description of the program, the planning process, and the issues that arose during the planning period and first year of implementation were presented at the 1986 AERA Convention.[1] The focus of the current paper will be on data collected primarily between April, 1986, and April, 1987, after the first group of candidates was promoted to the rank of career teacher and a second group was undergoing review for similar advancement this coming summer.

The career teacher rank carries with it a $2,500 per year salary supplement and in some cases slightly greater teaching responsibilities. Promotion to it is reserved for those who volunteer to undergo yearlong scrutiny by specially chosen review teams and demonstrate teaching excellence. In addition to direct observations of their teaching, parent and student survey responses and student outcome data are also considered in making final promotions recommendations. Out of an original group of 24 applicants, 19 teachers were promoted at the end of the first review. Another 26 teachers are being reviewed during the current year. The Danville teaching staff totals approximately 465.

Despite a widespread inclusion of many of the best features of previous plans and strong endorsement by the full planning task force, including all 12 teacher members, initial teacher reaction as a whole was predominantly negative after its first presentation in August, 1984. Substantial changes were made during the first year in line with teacher suggestions; yet surveys in March/April, 1985, and April, 1986, indicated a great amount of negative feeling remaining.

Of the four stages in this multi-year study of planned change, from initial and expanded planning through initial and expanded implementation, this paper will focus primarily on the latter part of stage three when the first set of candidates was under review and the first half of stage four when the next group of candidates was being reviewed and those who were promoted were having their first experiences in their new roles of career teacher. Promotions reviews are completed at the end of the school year, and decisions made in early July. Applications for career ladder candidacy are also received and review teams selected during the summer months. So data covering all of stage four will not be complete until this coming summer.

Data to be drawn on in this paper come from three sources: (a) a formal survey of teacher attitudes toward the career ladder and its summative evaluation system conducted in April, 1986;[2] (2) a series of indepth interviews

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Throughout this paper male pronouns will be used to refer to principals and other administrators and female pronouns, to teachers, to enhance clarity and readability.

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of principals, in July, 1986; and (c) narrative ethnographic notes made during the past year describing career ladder related events and commentary in context. Included in the latter are various documents and memoranda.

Although presentation of new data will cover only this past year, analysis and interpretation will draw directly on last year's analysis and the issues that were identified at that time. We will attempt to identify (a) which of the 29 issues described then seem to be resolved and no longer of major concern to administrators and teachers and (b) which remain unresolved and the subject of continuing debate. At least three issues have become more prominent than they were a year ago as a function of the plan's first implementation. One has to do with the position the new career teachers find themselves in. The other two relate to operational procedures and adjustments.

Attitude data from the three sources were coded and organized in relation to the issues. How often particular issues were mentioned or changes occurred in the direction and tone of related comments, helped determine whether or not issues had or had not been resolved. It is to the presentation of these findings we now turn.

Teacher Survey, April, 1986[2]

In April, 1986, questionnaires for obtaining reactions to the career ladder plan were mailed to all Danville teachers. A total of 318 were returned, a two-thirds response rate. Five of the 17 questions had been used in a previous survey permitting direct comparison of year earlier results. Interjudge coding agreement averaged 84 percent in the categorizing of responses to the five open-ended questions it included.

Overall findings of the April, 1986, poll of teachers suggested little change in the primarily negative sentiment reported in the 1985 survey. Approximately two-thirds of the teachers did not approve of the plan for one or more reasons. Relatively few expressed a belief that it would improve instruction (14%) or enhance the attraction or retention of outstanding teachers (9%). Quite the contrary, many indicated that it would cause dissension and distract teachers from good teaching. Responses to the five questions that had been asked a year earlier produced only one significant change, i.e., from almost no teachers to 10 percent indicating that other teachers would encourage them to apply for the career ladder if they wanted to do so. As in the earlier poll, attitudes toward the summative teacher evaluation system, now in its third year of use, were quite positive.

Two other major findings of the spring, 1986, poll were a considerably greater amount of support for the plan (a) among new teachers to the system and (b) among those who expressed some interest in applying for the career ladder themselves or some belief that it might improve instruction. Approximately one-third of the teachers were grouped in the latter category by not expressing a categorical "no" to all three opening questions: "Did you apply, do you intend to apply at the next opportunity, and do you think it will improve instruction?" Teachers new to the system, incidentally, were not beginning teachers. Almost all of them had taught elsewhere a number of years, so their significantly more positive attitudes were not a function of age or experience. More likely, it reflected their relative lack of full assimilation into the peer culture of the majority of teachers.

The lack of change in overall teacher attitudes from April, 1985, to April, 1986, is not surprising given the fact that not much had taken place during that year which could be expected to induce change. Candidates had been selected out of the first pool of applicants, review teams had been appointed and were busy performing their yearlong review, but the results would not be in until summer so no one was yet able to see the whole process completed. Earlier reactions would be expected to prevail because the structure of both the career ladder and the teacher evaluation system was unchanged from what had been described 20 months earlier. An intensive effort to communicate a full understanding of the plan had been attempted in the fall and winter, 1984-85, but was apparently unsuccessful in winning new converts. Many teachers expected the plan to be dropped if enough teacher hostility could be expressed for a long enough time. Others adopted a "wait and see" attitude until the process was completed and they could see who was promoted and how they fared.

School Board Review

In August, 1986, at a special meeting, the school board reviewed the plan and the results of the teacher survey with the continuing consultant. Budget projections for career ladder promotions through 1990-91 were presented by the superintendent. Recommendations for increasing the standards for advancement on the career ladder, based on one year of actual experience with the plan, were considered and adopted at a subsequent meeting. The board seemed united in its acceptance of the career ladder, despite the considerable negative teacher sentiment still in evidence, as a necessary long term strategy for the attraction and retention of outstanding teachers. Undoubtedly, the message conveyed by this concentrated review and action was a disappointment to those who throught strong teacher sentiment would bring about the plan's withdrawal. The data are not yet clear about how much greater willingness there might be for teachers to consider participating in the plan now that the board has reaffirmed its position.

Specific actions the board took included the following: (a) increased the number of years in career teacher rank from 2 to 3 as prerequisite for becoming a master teacher, (b) raised the standards for becoming a master teacher from 14 to 18 outstanding ratings out of a possible 24, with a minimum of 8 rather than 6 out of 11 instructional variables, (c) fast-tracked 14 current teacher evaluators so they could apply directly for master teacher candidacy at the end of their three-year evaluator term, skipping the career teacher step, and (d) raised standards for career teachers beginning in 1987-88 to 16 outstanding ratings including 7 or more in instruction.[3]

Career Ladder Activities During the 1986-87 School Year

Following the school board review and action, career ladder activities were pursued according to the directions and schedule specified in the manual as a new set of candidates came under yearlong review. Career ladder selection committees began meeting with candidates and later observed them teach. With help from their committees, candidates developed plans for measuring student learning in their classes. These plans were later forwarded for modification, if needed, and approval by the central selection committee. Meanwhile, career teachers were experiencing their first year with a new title, more pay, and in

some cases extra responsibility. All of this activity was taking place with little extra fanfare while other school priorities assumed the limelight. By design, the career ladder was now considered a fully installed part of the overall school program; and special attention could be focused on other matters.

The remainder of this paper will update last year's analysis of issues that emerged during the planning and first year of implementation (see Figure 1). Many of these issues were ultimately resolved as decisions were made about career ladder procedures in particular. Others are still unresolved but momentarily out-of-sight. They remain lurking in the background, however, as potential areas for renewed conflict. At least three issues have taken on new, more focused meaning this year as the plan becomes more fully operational. In the process of reviewing these issues one by one, the history of this year's career ladder activities will become more completely described.

Rewarding Teachers Differentially

The three issues related to paying teachers differentially according to how well they teach and what they do continue to be important, debatable matters. There has been no apparent change in feelings about the worthwhileness of merit pay (#1).* The majority of teachers still do not favor the notion; the school board and community at large still consider it a good idea.

There is little debate, however, over the Danville plan being workable, the other half of issue #1. The system is in place and has been implemented over its full cycle. Several adjustments have been made in how it operates on the basis of one year's experience, and it is nearing completion of a second cycle. The system is obviously workable. Whether the benefits match or exceed the trade-offs in teacher stress and administrator time and effort to make it function remains questionable.

The basis of the promotion (#2)--i.e., whether extra pay is for extra work or for doing the same work better, took on heightened meaning with the promotion of 19 teachers to the new rank of career teacher. In last summer's interviews, principals expressed a great deal of concern about what these teachers were to do in their new roles. Both the board and the central administration asked questions or made suggestions about how career teachers should be used, and other teachers watched as well to see how their own situations might be affected. Would they be expected to observe career teachers teach, as part of staff development? Would they be relieved of curriculum committee assignments which career teachers would take on? Principals were especially concerned that career teachers might be given new responsibilities for which they were not prepared, e.g., a kindergarten teacher asked to direct a staff workshop on reading. Board members wanted to know what extra duties would be carried out to justify the extra salaries.

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*The numbers cited in this section refer to the 29 issues described in a previous paper and listed in Figure 1.

Figure 1

EMERGENT ISSUES DURING CAREER LADDER PLANNING

General Notion of Rewarding Teachers Differentially

1. Worthwhileness and workability of merit pay*
2. Basis of promotion
3. Extent of differences in the quality of teaching performance

Likely Effects of Career Ladder Plan

4. Instructional improvement
5. Attracting and retaining teachers
6. Motivational value of merit pay
7. Competition or cooperation
8. Colleagial relationships
9. Teacher-administrator relationships
10. Cost factors
11. Accountability and control
12. Threat to job security

Who, How Many, and What Bases?

13. The number of teachers less than outstanding

Selection Processes

14. Workability of the evaluation/measurement system
15. Equal treatment
16. Increased expectations
17. Role and competence of the principal
18. Size and kind of reward
19. Ways to include student outcomes
20. How public to be?
21. Amount of paperwork
22. Random drawing
23. Tenure or not on the career ladder
24. Credibility of career ladder selections
25. Representativeness of the task force
26. Which side you on -- union or management?
27. Planning too fast, not complete
28. Minority representation
29. Amount of understanding of the plan

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*In this list of issues the term merit pay is meant to include all forms of extra pay for superior teaching, including promotion on a career ladder.

Concerns were eased when people were reminded that the primary reason for promotion was to reward good teaching, not to require more work. In most cases, the newly promoted teachers were among those who typically took whatever action was needed to do their jobs professionally and well regardless of the time and energy involved. New responsibilities, if any, were not expected to take more time, only a reordering of priorities, unless one accepted an extended contract. Despite clarification attempts, to what extent and in what manner career teachers will have greater responsibilities will probably remain ambiguous for a while longer.

A major source of teacher resistance to the career ladder plan is the public's assumption that some teachers do a much better job teaching than others, and those differences are extensive and easily detected (#3). Equalitarian tendencies are strong in education in contrast with the business world. For whatever historical reasons, teachers have come to expect equal and fair treatment. Direct comparison of one teacher with another is generally not recommended practice for school administrators, in part, to emphasize the many ways one can teach effectively and, in part, to recognize limitations in measures of teaching effectiveness.

In the absence of rigorous and closely monitored evaluation systems, teachers have felt free to teach in ways that suited themselves and not to worry about how others would like them to teach. Whatever pressure has prevailed in the past has typically come from the occasional non-precise ratings principals have to make, which tend to place everyone near the top of the scale. To judge otherwise increases the administrative burden; so, if parental complaints are few and discipline problems not blatant, most teachers have typically received the highest ratings possible. Teachers have not had to consider whether or not they are among the best. Their ratings have suggested they could not be better.

Now, however, for career ladder and merit pay purposes, the scales have been changed, and the assumption underlying the new ones indicate fewer ratings should be expected at the high end.

Likely Effects of the Plan

The debate has subsided somewhat over effects the plan might be having or likely to have, on instruction (#4), teacher motivation (#6), colleagial relationships (#8), school budgets (#10), and other such matters. Some of the early arguments were clearly rhetoric designed to scuttle the plan. As teachers recognized the sweeping nature of the plan and how much their own work lives might be affected, whether or not they chose to participate directly, opposition grew. As it became clear that the majority of teachers were not expected to be promoted on the career ladder, even though no specific percentages had been specified or quotas established, teacher disinterest became outright hostility. It was a plan for the few, not the many; and, as such, it potentially threatened a way-of-life that, if not always challenging or exciting, teachers at least understood and accepted.

With the school board reviewing and making relatively minor adjustments to the plan in the face of back-to-back polls showing considerable teacher opposition and the superintendent projecting costs into the 1990's, a message was clearly conveyed that the plan is here to stay for a good while. People

are now more likely to take a "wait and see" attitude rather than to make quick and perhaps superficial judgments about what is happening to teacher morale, teacher-administrator relationships (#9), etc.

For most of the issues, it is too early to judge the impact. Instructional change (#4) is unlikely to occur quickly or be detectable as yet. While the polls indicate that the majority of teachers do not think the plan will improve instruction, the new evaluation system, including an emphasis on what students are learning, is in place because of the plan; principals are in the classroom much more than before; and all teachers have been exposed to much clearer description of what good teaching is like. It is hard to believe that this activity will not affect instruction in a beneficial manner.

Obviously, it is too early to tell how many teachers will be attracted to teaching (#5) in Danville because of the plan. In the April, 1986, survey teachers who had been in Danville three years or less expressed significantly more positive attitudes toward the plan and greater interest in applying for promotion when they become eligible than other teachers. These teachers were more positive than negative, on average, on most of the survey items. With few exceptions, furthermore, these were experienced, not beginning, teachers because a relatively low turnover rate in recent years had not exhausted the pool of experienced applicants available. One of the telling arguments behind the board's continued support of the project is that the enhanced career and salary opportunities the plan provides will place Danville in a good position to attract some of the best teaching recruits a few years from now when a substantial number of present teachers will retire and the supply of new prospects is expected to be tight.

Whether increasing numbers of teachers will become sufficiently interested in the plan to apply remains to be seen. Because the number of evaluators was limited, only half of the first set of candidates were considered for promotion last year and the remainder are being reviewed this year. The second opportunity to apply will take place this coming summer. The board has indicated that all who apply and meet initial requirements will be accepted as candidates and reviewed for promotion next year. Who and how many actually apply will undoubtedly reveal much more about the resolution of underlying attitudes than any opinion poll. Although strong peer pressure not to participate still exists, only one of last summer's candidates actually withdrew from consideration prior to the beginning of school. Despite the majority sentiment, if the polls can be believed, almost a third of the teachers are sufficiently interested in what it might offer them not to reject it outright for now or the foreseeable future.

Little evidence exists so far about teachers possibly becoming more competitive (#7) and less willing to share ideas and assistance because of the plan. Few comments were heard that teachers might be withholding assistance to others. In a number of instances, career ladder candidates actually received help from their colleagues who served as neutral third parties in administering or scoring student outcome measures. Again, it would seem, actions speak more loudly than words. Despite peer pressure not to participate, teachers have received considerable assistance from other teachers in their efforts to be promoted.

Evidence of changed colleagial relationships (#8) is also sparse so far. In one school, teachers have been at least mildly upset over "an affected air" on the part of their promoted colleague. In other instances, teachers serving as evaluators on career ladder selection committees are considered "more rigorous and discriminating" than administrators in their use of performance measures and their judgments about the quality of teaching. There certainly is no indication that teachers, properly selected and trained, cannot serve as effectively as administrators on review teams established to identify outstanding teachers.

Teacher-administrator relationships remain a touchy issue (#9), more in some schools than others. Where administrators have had a solid teaching background themselves in the grades and subjects they are assigned to administer, it is more likely than not that teachers will respect instructional leadership and evaluation. Consistency in the application of the new evaluation system from school to school remains an important concern. In indicating on the 1986 survey why they did not intend to apply, 28 teachers specifically cited "inconsistency between schools" or "incompetency of principals as instructional evaluators."

The fact that no teachers from two schools applied for career ladder candidacy may, though not necessarily does, reflect the quality of trust between administrators and teachers as it does the attitudes of the individual educators in those buildings or the particular nature of the working culture. Traditional trade-offs between building principals and teachers, e.g., "I won't bother you if you don't bother me with problems and complaints" do not occur so easily in a system where rigorous evaluation is expected and administrators as well as teachers are held accountable.

Teacher comments in several schools indicated improvement in principals' evaluation practices following workshop training in the new system. Teachers who had seldom been observed in any formal way were now reporting systematic observation and conferencing in effect. In most places teachers were expressing greater confidence than earlier in principals' ability to evaluate teaching and provide assistance. More will be said later (#17) about principals' role conflicts brought on by the plan.

As with most career ladder or merit pay plans, how the system will operate if budgets get tight and salary reductions are needed is a major concern, not just for board members but teachers as well (#10). Will basic pay be cut to preserve the incentive awards for outstanding teachers? Will the former be saved at the expense of the latter? How will each component of the overall teacher salary figure fare when reductions occur, as they inevitably will some day?

Considerable resistance to the installation of teacher incentive structures has come from the feeling that basic salaries must be raised substantially in most school districts before any consideration should be given to a differential reward structure. How much they should be raised first varies from locality to locality and individual to individual within those localities. The target is always moving so it is hard to tell when it might be reached. Compared to employee gains in many other fields during the past four or five years, teachers' salaries have often progressed much faster.

To finesse this issue and reduce one source of likely resistance, two Virginia school systems recently included the highest across-the-board salary raises ever (16%, 12%) as part of their proposals for career ladder plans. In Danville, budget figures were projected to cover the supplements for career and master teachers through the 1990-91 school year. Estimates were made that as many as 121 of the teachers might be on the ladder by then earning $2,500 and $4,000 supplements per year, exclusive of extended contract activities they might also engage in. A total of 1.4 million dollars would be needed to cover the five years of supplements between now and then, 2.1 percent of what the basic salaries alone would total.* By that time, several things might have occurred to resolve issues related to the financing of such plans:

(a) Most school systems will have installed some form of incentive pay, thus increasing the acceptance of career ladders as common practice.

(b) Virginia will have provided special funding for such programs, as is currently being done in several other states.

(c) Improvements will have occurred in the way schools are organized and instruction delivered under a partially differentiated staffing plan, so the separation of basic salary and incentive pay line items will no longer seem necessary. Teaching personnel will be paid according to the ranks they hold and responsibilities they carry. The latter will be determined by the needs of the school system.

Until one or more of the above happen, it is important to keep pay supplements separate from basic salary components, so teachers who are promoted will not feel their extra pay comes from the salaries of other teachers. In a current study of the 11 Virginia school systems that are operating pay-for-performance or career ladder programs, most superintendents indicate the overall cost of teacher salaries, including incentive supplements, is greater than it probably would have been if they did not have such a plan. In other words, greater raises in across-the-board salaries are unlikely, in the judgment of the chief administrators, so the supplements are add-ons that would probably not have been distributed as further basic pay increases, if there were no incentive system.

The extent to which schools are, and should be, responsive to parents and the community as a whole is a part of the accountability and control issue (#11). Teachers and administrators often feel parents and other members of the community cannot be expected to know what goes on at school, nor are they able to provide much useful direction. How much weight should be assigned to parent survey data, for example, in determining whether or not a candidate should be promoted to career teacher rank? "Parent opinions," it was argued in connection with interpreting the results of a candidate's survey, "merely parrot what their children say." Talking to parents, however, one often detects not only a strong interest in what the school is trying to do but established opinions about the

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*In the absence of any official projections of future salaries, I am conservatively assuming a 5% basic salary annual increase in deriving this percentage as well as no change in the size of the teaching force.

quality of teaching of particular teachers. Accurately or not, parents and other taxpayers are the ultimate consumers who must be satisfied, at least in part, if schools are to be allowed to function. Although parents are not expected to play a major role in the operation of the career ladder, their collective judgment is considered in the evaluation process. How teachers communicate with parents is one of several teacher performance patterns that is almost always assessed.

Job security (#12) is still not threatened directly by how, or even whether, one participates in this program. Nevertheless, to the extent that increased scrutiny of teacher behavior leads to greater detection of performance deficiencies, job security of teachers who regularly perform poorly may ultimately be placed in jeopardy. To the extent that teachers try and fail to be promoted, furthermore, disappointment could lead to disillusionment with teaching and ultimately to withdrawal from the profession. None of those candidates who dropped out of the program or ultimately failed to be promoted on their first try have resigned from teaching so far.* Job security should not be in jeopardy nor become a major issue because of the career ladder.

Who and How Many Teachers are Outstanding(#13)

Still a major issue, most teachers see themselves as outstanding and reject the notion that others may be significantly better than they. This perception lies at the root of much of the fault-finding with the career ladder. Most of the discussion of issue #3 is pertinent here as well.

In addition to how many teachers might be sufficiently good to earn promotion, who makes it and who does not also affects acceptance of the plan by teachers and administrators. In spite of efforts not to reveal the names of candidates until they are promoted, the "grapevine" works fast in most schools and teachers learn rather quickly, often from remarks candidates themselves make, who has applied. Administrators and teachers involved in the evaluation process, of course, treat the review process very confidentially, not revealing to others outside their career ladder selection teams what they observe and learn about candidates or, presumably, even whom they are reviewing. There is no way, however, that with such an intense and prolonged review process the candidates' identities can be hidden from those who work near them.

Comments made by a number of teachers and principals alluded to the fact that many teachers have established reputations as especially good teachers or, in other instances, rather poor teachers. The extent of consensus will vary from one teacher to another. How valid these judgments might be is less important than how much conviction and agreement exist about who the especially good and especially weak teachers are.

The career ladder will tend to gain favor with teachers if a good number of "especially good teachers" apply and make it. It will lose credibility as a system to the extent that "weak teachers" apply and are promoted.

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*Two dropped out of the program for health reasons.

In Danville, this informal "grapevine jury" is still out. Not enough "especially good" teachers were considered in the first set of candidates. Unfortunately, because of the luck of the draw, no high school teachers of regular academic subjects were chosen from the first pool of applicants; vocational, business, and resource specialists were selected instead. Acceptance of the plan by the majority of secondary teachers will depend in part on how teachers of academic subjects who are under review this year fare, especially those with well established reputations. Informal consensus comments so far indicate that, although many of the first candidates may not be outstanding, relatively few poor teachers have applied to date and of those who have completed the process successfully, none are considered really poor teachers.

Selection Processes

Fifteen issues were identified last year that were related to procedural details of the plan or the planning process. How would candidates be selected and reviewed? Who would be involved in the process? What criteria, standards, and measurement processes would be used? How could fair and equal treatment be assured, paperwork kept manageable, minorities appropriately represented, and a realistic time schedule for all the conferences and observations worked out?

For the most part, the debates on these and other planning issues have subsided as the plan has been put into operation and found functional. Occasionally, some of them still stir up small arguments about how something might be done better, but for the most part planning decisions have taken the form of specific procedures, standards, and guidelines that together constitute the Danville career ladder plan. Separately, they are no longer issues that demand further reflection and debate. For the most part they are, instead, former issues that have been resolved through consensus decision-making of the original task force with relatively minor adjustments made later in the process of securing final board action and endorsement.

Brief comments will be made about each of these former issues, how they were resolved and how those few that still linger on as areas of continuing concern are currently manifested:

14. The workability of the new teacher evaluation system

Because of the heavy burden the new system imposes on administrators, the administration no longer requires teachers who are not interested in career ladder promotion to be formally evaluated annually; every other year is sufficient. Career ladder candidates, however, must still be formally evaluated in two successive years to be eligible for candidacy the following year.

Principals are still expected to make informal, drop-in visits in all classrooms and provide feedback to teachers on what they observe. In response to an open-ended question on how to improve the system, 36 teachers suggested "unannounced, unscheduled observations," which tied with "outside evaluators" as the most frequently mentioned recommendation in the survey. Nevertheless, several complaints have been heard this year from teachers who find these informal visits as much of a nuisance as

formal evaluation would have created. Apparently, teachers who opted for formal evaluation only every other year really expected to be free from administrative scrutiny.

15. Equal treatment

It is still important for teachers to receive equal treatment. The importance of this principle was evident in at least three ways this past year: (a) In reviewing student outcome plans and results, the central selection committee had to judge whether stated teaching goals were important and data collected would really indicate solid learning had occurred. On numerous occasions, questions were raised about the consistency of the committee's judgments from one candidate to another. (b) Similar charges of inconsistency in principals' application of evaluation procedures and criteria from one school to another were also heard, although a number of teachers indicated improvement had occurred as a result of the training workshops. (c) When the standards were increased following the August, 1986, board meeting, the new standards were not to be applied until the remainder of the first pool of applicants had been reviewed for promotion. The new standards would go into effect for everyone this coming summer, including those already on the career ladder. The equal treatment principle may be hard to apply in all situations, but, if it is not practiced, personnel troubles are likely.

16. Increased expectations

Vocal complaint over the initial specification of the many factors that teachers are to be judged on, i.e., the PCT and the presumed rigor of the assessment procedures for career ladder candidates, has died down as teachers and principals conferred over how well teaching was being conducted. Feedback teachers received from principals after observing, scripting, and then rating instructional variables was usually informative, and expectancies were communicated much more precisely than ever before. On average, a relatively large number of Is (improvement needed) and few Os (outstanding) given during fall observations changed to few Is and more Os during spring observations during the first year's use of the new scales. Still higher ratings resulted during the second year of use (1985-86) as teachers became even more accustomed to how they were being judged and tried to meet these more precise expectations.

Final ratings last year were distributed not too differently than they had been under the old system. When an analysis showed more than half the teachers receiving high enough ratings to qualify for career ladder promotion, a decision was made, based on the consultant's and superintendent's recommendations, to increase the number of Os needed to qualify as a career teacher and to increase even more the number needed to become a master teacher. The amount of increase was relatively modest in both cases but designed to restrict advancement to those whose teaching was clearly above average. This action was justified by

reference to the arbitrary establishment of the original standards. Based on a year's experience with the new system, an increase seemed in order.

Representatives of the local teachers' association informed the superintendent this past fall that the lack of descriptors for non-instructional PCT items was the biggest remaining weakness of the plan. (The original task force had developed descriptors for only the 11 instructional variables.) With advice from a committee of building administrators he prepared and distributed a draft of descriptors covering the other areas. After viewing these proposed descriptors, which stated rather explicitly what outstanding, as contrasted with competent, performance ought to consist of, teachers complained about unfairly changing the rules in midstream and some of the current candidates threatened to withdraw from the program. In response, the superintendent indicated that the proposed descriptors would not be used, as they had been designed to help, not hurt, the evaluation process. He invited teachers again to suggest descriptors for these areas. To date, i.e., several months later, none have been submitted for consideration nor has there been further teacher pressure for the plan to contain them. It would seem as if the current standards and procedures are firmly entrenched and unlikely to change much in the future. Also, in judging performance in these areas, whatever administrator discretion already prevails will even be enhanced because no precise descriptors are available for use.

17. Role and competence of the principal

As indicated earlier (#15), principals' ability to evaluate consistently and well has improved as a result of training and increased familiarity with the new system. Some concerns about the competence of both principals and teacher evaluators were raised in last spring's survey, but the number of teachers making such complaints was less than 12 percent of the responders, not as many as might be expected to express "sour grapes" attitudes toward the whole system.

It is clear that the principal has a dual function to perform. He is supposed to provide an objective, neutrally toned rating of the quality of instruction as an outside observer might do. At the same time, he is employed to assist in the improvement of instruction and do whatever he can to help teachers improve. He obviously has a vested interest in the ratings, which complicates his task of making an objective assessment for the institution.

The system provides one safeguard for the principal in letting him share the responsibility with two other people for the ratings career ladder candidates receive. Thus, the decision is a team judgment, and individual ratings are not to be communicated. They are used instead to work out a final team judgment. This practice should help the principal keep his two roles separate.

18. The size and kind of reward

Little has been said and certainly no concentrated effort made to amend the amount of money that goes with promotion or to develop other specific rewards. A few teachers have suggested that the amount of money involved is too little to interest them in applying. Some of those who have applied, however, are more negative than positive about the plan themselves; so the reward is obviously big enough to serve as an inducement for them. To the extent that the kinds and numbers of people the board would like to attract do indeed participate, the present rewards will probably be maintained. So far there seems little reason to change them.

19. Student outcomes

Considerable effort has gone into the development of ways to gather, score, and interpret valid student outcome data to be used, along with other information, in estimating teaching effectiveness. Elsewhere we describe what steps were taken to strengthen guidelines and improve practice in this area.[4]

Despite early misgivings about the inclusion of such data, teachers chose student outcome data as the second most relevant source of data for determining teaching effectiveness out of several alternatives. Only the principal had a higher rating on the 1985 survey as a good source of data. We suspect that the relatively high ranking student data received stems in part from the fact that candidates have a great deal to say about what instructional objectives are to be assessed and how student attainment of these objectives is to be determined. They propose the objectives, the assessment instruments, and a plan for collecting, scoring, and interpreting relevant information. Their career ladder selection committee reviews and approves, after modification if needed, these proposals. So does a central selection committee.

Controversy arose this year, as well as a year ago, when the latter committee did not approve the vast majority of plans after they had been submitted and approved by the career ladder selection committees. In some cases, more operational details were needed before a final judgment could be rendered: who was going to score a test? What steps were being taken to prevent direct teaching of a test? etc. In several cases, the significance of target objectives or passing standards was questioned, i.e., whether proposed objectives really indicated significant learning or whether, instead, most children could be expected to reach them regardless of the teaching. The central selection committee was attempting to enhance the collection and use of valid data and consistency in what candidates were expected to provide despite vast differences in teaching objectives, grade-levels and subject matter. The lack of common measures and local norms for many tests exacerbated scoring and interpretation problems. In one or two instances, evidence of

cheating, by teaching specific items or potential cheating by duplicating a supposedly secure standardized test, was reported.

Complaints emanating from principals chairing career ladder selection committees suggested the central selection committee needed to provide better directives ahead of time rather than counteracting the combined judgment of three professionals closer to the situation. A certain amount of controversy is bound to erupt whenever one committee exercises its authority over another in matters of professional judgment. What should be a built-in safeguard committee to increase consistency in the judgment process across a considerable variety of people and situations could easily become a major roadblock to the successful operation of such plans if its actions come to be viewed as arbitrary and inconsistent (the fair treatment principle). Obviously trust and good communication between the parties involved are necessary.

20. How public?

What might once have been an issue no longer seems to be one. Although the names of candidates under review are not announced officially in any way, everyone seems to know who they are. It was left to principals to decide how those who were promoted in their schools would first be announced. Even the press did not insist on knowing the names of the new career teachers the night the board acted in executive session. They were told of the complications such publicity might create at the school level, especially with parents, and did not pursue the matter. When the names of the career teachers appeared later in the school system's newsletter, "School Talk," no strong complaints or extra publicity resulted from the announcement. In brief, a decision was made by the original task force to minimize the fanfare and keep the names of teachers involved as much out of the limelight as possible. Publicity is still minimal.

21. Paperwork

Although the original paperwork requirements were reduced, when the dossier was eliminated, a lot of information does have to be collected and analyzed on each candidate. What data and how they are collected are up to the candidate and principal particularly to decide, along with the other committee members. The main difference between the former dossier requirement and current procedures is the expectancy that considerable information about candidate's activities will be conveyed orally during several conferences with the committee rather than in written form. Some candidates are keeping written records, anyway, to be sure their committees have what they consider important.

The amount of information gathered and assessed on each candidate is considerable. People realize that a comprehensive, fair assessment system does require a good deal of record keeping. The elimination of the formal dossier, however, did result in less controversy over "too much paperwork."

22. Random drawing

The great random drawing controversy seems to be over. What had been chosen by the task force as the fairest way to ensure unbiased selection of the first candidates from a pool that was too large for the number of trained evaluators available became a major symbol of all that was wrong with the plan. That some teachers would receive a $2,500 promotion one year earlier than other teachers because of a random drawing seemed blatantly wrong to many teachers. The negative emotion expressed over this matter was far greater than that displayed toward almost any other issue.

Because of the intensity of this response, repeating that action ought to be avoided if the need to restrict numbers arises again. To ease tension over this issue the superintendent announced last August that after all of the remaining first year candidates were reviewed this year, the evaluation process would be open to all teachers who met initial requirements and chose to participate as career ladder candidates. "We hope we'll never have to use a random drawing again." Presumably this matter is settled.

23. Tenure on the career ladder

The task force's decision to require persons on the career ladder to reapply and undergo periodic review every few years to keep their advanced status has never been seriously questioned. Indefinite promotion to advanced rank is no longer under consideration, and, therefore, not an issue.

One of the adjustments made last August was increasing time in the career teacher rank from two to three years before one could become a master teacher. The change was made to help synchronize promotions schedules for the two advanced ranks and to increase the availability of trained evaluators. Career teachers cannot serve as evaluators during a year when they are under review themselves. No serious objections were made to this change, presumably because of the reasons cited but also because no one had yet reached the stage when she would be directly affected. Again the wisdom is clear of fine tuning such plans as early as possible.

24. Credibility of career ladder selections

As discussed at length earlier (issue #13), the selection system will attain credibility with both the administration and teachers in general only if most of the teachers who try be promoted and succeed already have good reputations among those who know them best, i.e., principals and teachers in particular. It is important that those who are considered weak teachers not succeed in being promoted unless the review process makes it abundantly clear that they are very good teachers indeed. Although teachers do not officially vote on whether their colleagues should make it, they do have general impressions about

the quality of their teaching which will determine in part how effective they think the evaluation process really is. So far, the jury is out on this issue because not enough people have completed their reviews to really judge how well it is working. Although a few comments were recorded that the quality of the candidates was not impressive, no specific complaints were heard that "weak" teachers really made it.

25. Representativeness of the task force

With the main task force disbanded some 18 months ago, how representative it was of all teachers is now a mute point. To attain broader understanding and involvement of teachers after the initial planning period, members were added to the planning task force from schools not originally represented during the subsequent year while the plan was being completed. In addition, a communications committee was established, composed in part of active dissenters.

The special quality of the original task force members was formally recognized by the superintendent when he proposed to the board last August that because some of them had become evaluators, thus postponing the opportunity to go on the career ladder for three years, and because "they were among the best teachers in the system," they should be allowed to apply directly for master teacher status so as to be included in the first group to reach this step on the ladder. The board supported this fast-tracking recommendation with little apparent dissent from others.

26. Union or management

Locally as well as nationally, teacher association leadership is cautious about, if not firmly opposed,to career ladder and merit pay plans to the extent that they might promote elitism and divide the membership ranks. Following release of the Carnegie report NEA President, Mary Futrell, who along with AFT President, Al Shanker, had signed the document, released a separate statement expressing concerns about possible elitism.[5]

In Danville the local leadership of the teachers' association has changed hands recently. The former president had been quite critical as had the local VEA coordinator. Following the August board meeting, she was quoted: "I hope this will be the last effort to save this poor thing."[6] Her successor, however, a member of the original task force, stated after the same meeting: "It's now a working plan; it's not a proposal. We have to deal with it since it is here. If it fails, it'll fail because people won't apply to it. If they apply, it'll work."[7]

It is certain that career ladders, which have typically been established in response to board or legislative actions rather than teacher demands, present a challenge to teacher association leadership. The local leadership is likely to play an important part in helping or resisting the development of a successful plan.

27. Planned and installed too fast

This issue, too, is mainly history. Despite the plan's complexity and considerable resistance to it, the first cycle was completed on schedule with 19 teachers promoted and a second cycle is nearing completion. Substantial annual salary supplements will have already been paid to more than 12 percent of the teachers (career teachers and evaluators) by the end of next year with the numbers of participants and corresponding budget commitments projected to more than double in the next three years. What changes have been made are relatively minor in relation to the many criteria, standards, procedures, and schedule details that together constitute the plan. In hindsight, more planning time might have permitted more involvement and greater support from teachers. It is also possible that more time would have given the forces opposing the plan more opportunity to resist its development and perhaps succeed in scuttling it.

28. Minority representation

This, too, is no longer an issue. Minorities are fully involved in all aspects of the plan—as evaluators, candidates, career teachers, and operational committee members--in numbers approximately proportionate to their population. No special actions were needed to produce these results.

29. Understanding the plan

The April, 1986, survey produced a number of teacher comments suggesting a certain degree of resentment of the hard-sell effort that had been made in the communications committee meetings, in school briefings, and in much repeated explanation of how the plan would work. Several teachers expressed strong displeasure at being surveyed several times, when their previous complaints to get rid of the plan were not heeded.

Despite the complaints of "explanation overload," numerous statements or questions recorded in the ethnographic data base this past year show the plan is still not fully and accurately understood by all teachers. Some complaints are based on misconceptions of how the plan works and are not justified. Overall, however, increased understanding seems to be occurring as more and more people go through the review process.

Summary and Conclusions

With the plan clearly operational and a second candidate cohort nearing completion of the yearlong review process, debates over procedural details have eased and the staff's former preoccupation with the career ladder has clearly subsided. Teachers and administrators are gradually adjusting to what has produced major changes in the Danville schools. A differential salary and status system has been installed in which one out of every eight teachers is already participating as evaluators, career teachers, or candidates. Budget projections have been made to cover expansion of the plan during the next five

years to involve approximately one-fourth of all the teachers including master teachers at still higher salaries and status.

A greatly improved evaluation system has also been installed which directly affects all administrative and teaching personnel. Higher and more precisely defined standards elicit not only increased scrutiny but the possibility of greater assistance and improved instruction. Although most Danville educators endorse the changes made in the evaluation system, they also recognize its costs in administrator time and teacher stress. When offered the option of not being formally evaluated every year, unless they were interested in volunteering for the career ladder, most teachers accepted the offer. The career ladder is clearly designed for teachers willing to undergo increased scrutiny as one price to pay for higher status and salary. The pressure of extra scrutiny may well be a greater deterrent to career ladder participation than the expectation of increased responsibility. To the extent that career teachers assume few extra jobs, the extra scrutiny will serve as the primary deterrent. Underlying all evaluation reactions, of course, is the self-confidence, or lack thereof, one brings to the situation. The importance of voluntary participation in this and other career ladder plans cannot be overestimated. It is this feature that promotes the first and often the most accurate evaluation, namely, self-assessment.

Although the majority of teachers still express displeasure over the plan and indicate they do not intend to participate, a third have not closed the door on that possibility. Interest is significantly greater among teachers relatively new to the system, a sign perhaps that it will serve to attract teacher applicants to Danville as expected teacher shortages materialize in the years ahead.

Strong peer pressure has been exerted on many teachers not to participate. Yet, even here, some easing is evident. Significantly fewer teachers indicated in the 1986 poll than a year earlier that they expected their teaching colleagues to react negatively and discouragingly if they applied for promotion on the career ladder. The fact that many candidates have received assistance from other teachers in administering and scoring their student outcome measures is probably more important than contrary indications on a survey.

Most issues related to procedural details have been resolved. One more fundamental than perhaps any of the others has also been at least temporarily resolved, namely who is in charge (#26). The original idea of a differential pay plan to reward outstanding teachers came from the community, as is the case throughout the country. Although teachers were involved in its development and their leadership and support will continue to affect its success, it is still an imposed change effort that the majority of teachers did not and still do not want. To a considerable extent, the strong opposition of many teachers, as expressed particularly in the polls, can be viewed as a challenge of management's prerogative to run the school system.

When school board members reviewed the plan in a special meeting last August and then acted to raise the standards a bit to ensure greater rigor, in the face of still strong opposition, they clearly indicated they were not to be easily dissuaded on what has to be the most sweeping programatic change in the Danville schools in recent history. It will be interesting to see how teachers

respond this coming summer when they have a second opportunity to volunteer for promotion now that the board has acted and the smoke has cleared somewhat by the resolution of many early issues.

Underneath the current lull in open debate about the career ladder a "wait and see" attitude still persists. To the extent that procedures are violated and unacceptable judgments made, remaining unresolved issues, now temporarily out of sight, might quickly surface again. To the extent established procedures are followed and "good" judgments made, successful installation of the plan would seem to be nearing completion. Its long term impact should become evident in the years ahead.

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